

Post Surgery Risks: Deep Venous Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism After Arthroscopic Surgery

Although relatively uncommon, blood clots can occur after arthroscopic surgery. When a blood clot occurs in a vein, it is called a deep venous thrombosis, or DVT. Sometimes a DVT can break apart and travel to the lung, which is called a pulmonary embolism, or PE. A PE is a very serious problem and can even be life-threatening.

In patients undergoing knee arthroscopy, DVT's typically occur in the legs. In patients undergoing shoulder arthroscopy, DVT's can occur either in the surgical arm or in the legs. Fortunately, the risk of clinically significant DVT after outpatient arthroscopic surgery is very low, but every patient who undergoes surgery is at some risk.

Several factors are known to increase the risk of DVT, obesity, smoking, hormone replacement therapy, cancer, immobility, and a personal or family history of DVT or PE.

It is important to tell your physician if you, or a family member, have had a DVT or PE, or if you have known risk factors for DVT. Signs and symptoms of DVT include significant swelling and/or pain of the extremity. Signs and symptoms of a PE may include shortness of breath, painful breathing, chest pain, anxiety, or rapid heart rate. **If you are concerned about a DVT or PE, it is imperative that you get in touch with your physician's care team.**

There are several things you can do to minimize your risk of DVT after surgery.

- **Decreasing venous stasis – Lower Extremity:** You will be issued white stockings during surgery, which should be worn at all times for at least 5 days after surgery. These stockings help to minimize pooling of blood in the legs (“venous stasis”) and improve venous return to the heart. Narcotic pain medicines will sometimes make you drowsy and you may be inclined to spend more time than usual either laying down or sleeping. Despite this fact, it is imperative to get up and walk around at least once every couple of hours. Furthermore, when you are sitting in a chair or on a couch, you should frequently pump your ankles and bend your knees. These simple measures will help to keep the blood circulating throughout the body and minimize venous stasis.
- **Decreasing venous stasis – Shoulder:** It is important to come out of the sling several times per day and work on elbow, wrist, and hand motion. You should come out of the sling at least once every 2-3 hours to perform these exercises in order to allow for improved circulation and decreased venous stasis in the upper extremity.
- **Smoking cessation:** Smoking is known to increase the risk of DVT. Complete cessation of smoking one week before surgery and at least one month after surgery will enhance the ability of your body to heal after surgery, and may also decrease your risk of DVT or PE. Simply put, stop smoking.

In summary, DVT and PE are uncommon but potentially serious problems after surgery. Please follow the simple instructions outlined above to minimize your risk. If you have known risk factors for, please let a member of your care team know so they can discuss the risks and benefits of prescription blood thinners.